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SUBJECT: KARBALA PROVINCE GOES PIC

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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Karbala Cable

¶2. (SBU) Summary: On October 29, Karbala Province became a Province under Iraqi control (PIC). The arrival of PIC status was celebrated in a three-hour ceremony hosted by Karbala Province and attended by the Prime Minister and Karbala notables, 3ID MG Lynch, PRTOffs, foreign and domestic media, and Embassy press officer. The event included a parade at the Karbala stadium by all of the Karbala security and public safety units, and a signing ceremony which formalized the transfer of security authority from the coalition to the Karbala government and operations center. End Summary.

¶3. (U) The ceremony began with a parade review by Karbala's security and public safety units for the Prime Minister and attending dignitaries. The Iraqi Army, police, the SWAT team, river patrol, ambulance service (featuring Japanese ambulances donated by Iran), the special shrine protection force marching with shields and riot control gear rather than long guns, women police units, and the fire fighting units. The parade was punctuated by sporadic cries from tribal leaders on the dais calling out with traditional chants of support. The parade also featured an enactment of a SWAT unit rescuing hostages from a bus and arresting the malefactors.

¶4. (U) Prime Minister Maliki, Governor Ageel, and MG Lynch spoke at the ceremony. Prime Minister Maliki emphasized reconciliation. "Iraq has entered a tunnel, but can get out only by wisdom and preparedness. It can not break out by unconsciousness, ignorance, and terrorism and killing sentiments. Those features cannot build the country." He noted that Iraq should be built on the basis of reconciliation, mutual understanding, efficiency, and willing to give others their rights~reconciliation is one of the biggest achievements. He also aid that Iraq had to combat corruption in the same way it was combating terrorism.

¶5. (U) Governor Ageel followed, also stressing the theme of reconciliation, saying that Karbala had opened its doors to IDPs - both Sunni and Shi'a. He maintained that Karbala had taken a united stand on reconciliation supported by citizens, the hawzas, and civil society. He called preparation for PIC a "project presented by the Prime Minister." The Governor noted that the Prime Minister had asked that Karbala become a city empty of weapons - that they needed to be out of the hands of anyone who did not represent the government. Only the armed forces and law enforcement should have weapons. This would clear the way to start on other projects leading to a prosperous and

peaceful Iraq. He also added that his remarks did not mean that Karbala had reached his expectations of readiness, and that training, equipping and recruiting for the security forces would continue.

¶16. (U) MG Lynch praised the work of the Iraqi security forces, particularly during recent months during the Shabania incident of September 27-28, and a recent security operation in north Karbala after mortar rounds had landed in a residential district. The 3ID commanding general noted that the Karbala forces had handled these incidents themselves and praised the professionalism of 8th Iraqi Division Command MG Uthman, Operations Center head LTG Kassem, Police head BG Ri'ad, and Husseiniya City Iraqi Army brigad commander BG Amad. MG Lynch noted that the Iraqi security forces had been planning and preparing for the handing over of the security file for the last eight months. He stressed that the fact of handing over the security file did not mean that the coalition no longer cares about Karbala, and that we would continue training and reconstruction activities.

¶17. (C) Comment: This was a proud day for the Iraqi and Karbala government and the mood in the stadium was buoyant. The Prime Minister and the Governor both made positive statements on reconciliation and the role of the security forces in bringing stability and public safety to all Iraqis. While some, even many Iraqis privately may not yet believe all of the Iraqi security forces are entirely ready to enforce the law in an even handed way for all Iraqis, such is the strength of nationalistic feeling that no Iraqi wishes to publicly voice sentiment to slow PIC processes down once they have been announced. In fact, PM Maliki took MG Lynch aside briefly after the ceremony to register unhappiness with a provision in the text of the transfer document on access for coalition forces to Karbala post PIC, which the PM clearly thought should be more formal and stringent rather than language promising best efforts to notify. This, despite the language having been agreed to by the Joint Committee for Security Transition Readiness (JCSTR)

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PIC process and approved by the GOI and the provincial government. Even so, it is clear that the Karbala (and central government) authorities will continue to want support from 3ID and the PRT in Karbala, while at the same time expecting that USG representatives remain sensitive to Iraqi sensitivities on sovereignty issues. Overall, the surge has clearly lowered levels of violence in many parts Iraq, and the Karbala security forces have developed their capability to the point where they have recently weathered two challenges to security in the last two months with steadfast determination and arrested large numbers of malefactors. The security situation is far better than it has been in some time in Karbala after the Shabania riots and subsequent arrests of militia members who took part, but obviously, far from perfect.

SIMMONS
SCOTT